HOVAMOL

The Ballad of the High One

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This poem follows the *Voluspo* in the *Codex Regius*, but is preserved in no other manuscript. The first stanza is quoted by Snorri, and two lines of stanza 84 appear in one of the sagas.

In its present shape it involves the critic of the text in more puzzles than any other of the Eddic poems. Without going in detail into the various theories, what happened seems to have been somewhat as follows. There existed from very early times a collection of proverbs and wise counsels, which were attributed to Othin just as the Biblical proverbs were to Solomon. This collection, which presumably was always elastic in extent, was known as "The High One's Words," and forms the basis of the present poem. To it, however, were added other poems and fragments dealing with wisdom which seemed by their nature to imply that the speaker was Othin. Thus a catalogue of runes, or charms, was tacked on, and also a set of proverbs, differing essentially in form from those comprising the main collection. Here and there bits of verse more nearly narrative crept in; and of course the loose structure of the poem made it easy for any reciter to insert new stanzas almost at will. This curious miscellany is what we now have as the *Hovamol*.

Five separate elements are pretty clearly recognizable: (1) the *Hovamol* proper (stanzas 1-80), a collection of proverbs and counsels for the conduct of life; (2) the *Loddfafnismol* (stanzas 111-138), a collection somewhat similar to the first, but specific ally addressed to a certain Loddfafnir; (3) the *Ljothatal* (stanzas 147-165), a collection of charms; (4) the love-story of Othin and Billing's daughter (stanzas 96-102), with an introductory dissertation on the faithlessness of women in general (stanzas 81-95), which probably crept into the poem first, and then pulled the story, as an apt illustration, after it; (5) the story of how Othin got the mead of poetry--the draught which gave him the gift of tongues--from the maiden Gunnloth (stanzas 103-110). There is also a brief passage (stanzas 139 146) telling how Othin won the runes, this passage being a natural introduction to the *Ljothatal*, and doubtless brought into the poem for that reason.

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It is idle to discuss the authorship or date of such a series of accretions as this. Parts of it are doubtless among the oldest relics of ancient Germanic poetry; parts of it may have originated at a relatively late period. Probably, however, most of its component elements go pretty far back, although we have no way of telling how or when they first became associated.

It seems all but meaningless to talk about "interpolations" in a poem which has developed almost solely through the process of piecing together originally unrelated odds and ends. The notes, therefore, make only such suggestions as are needed to keep the main divisions of the poem distinct.

Few gnomic collections in the world's literary history present sounder wisdom more tersely expressed than the Hovamol. Like the Book of Proverbs it occasionally rises to lofty heights of poetry. If it presents the worldly wisdom of a violent race, it also shows noble ideals of loyalty, truth, and unfaltering courage.

1. Within the gates | ere a man shall go,
(Full warily let him watch,)
Full long let him look about him;
For little he knows | where a foe may lurk,
And sit in the seats within.

2. Hail to the giver! | a guest has come;
Where shall the stranger sit?
Swift shall he be who, | with swords shall try
The proof of his might to make.

[1. This stanza is quoted by Snorri, the second line being omitted in most of the *Prose Edda* manuscripts.

2. Probably the first and second lines had originally nothing to do with the third and fourth, the last two not referring to host or guest, but to the general danger of backing one's views with the sword.]

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3. Fire he needs | who with frozen knees
Has come from the cold without;
Food and clothes | must the farer have,
The man from the mountains come.

4. Water and towels | and welcoming speech
Should he find who comes, to the feast;
If renown he would get, | and again be greeted,
Wisely and well must he act.

5. Wits must he have | who wanders wide,
But all is easy at home;
At the witless man | the wise shall wink
When among such men he sits.

6. A man shall not boast | of his keenness of mind,
But keep it close in his breast;
To the silent and wise | does ill come seldom
When he goes as guest to a house;

(For a faster friend | one never finds
Than wisdom tried and true.)

7. The knowing guest | who goes to the feast,
In silent attention sits;
With his ears he hears, | with his eyes he watches,
Thus wary are wise men all.

[6. Lines 5 and 6 appear to have been added to the stanza.]

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8. Happy the one | who wins for himself
Favor and praises fair;
Less safe by far | is the wisdom found
That is hid in another's heart.

9. Happy the man | who has while he lives
Wisdom and praise as well,
For evil counsel | a man full oft
Has from another's heart.

10. A better burden | may no man bear
For wanderings wide than wisdom;
It is better than wealth | on unknown ways,
And in grief a refuge it gives.

11. A better burden | may no man bear
For wanderings wide than wisdom;
Worse food for the journey | he brings not afield
Than an over-drinking of ale.

12. Less good there lies | than most believe
In ale for mortal men;
For the more he drinks | the less does man
Of his mind the mastery hold.

[12. Some editors have combined this stanza in various ways with the last two lines of stanza it, as in the manuscript the first two lines of the latter are abbreviated, and, if they belong there at all, are presumably identical with the first two lines of stanza 10.]

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13. Over beer the bird | of forgetfulness broods,
And steals the minds of men;
With the heron's feathers | fettered I lay
And in Gunnloth's house was held.

14. Drunk I was, | I was dead-drunk,
When with Fjalar wise I was;
'Tis the best of drinking | if back one brings
His wisdom with him home.

15. The son of a king | shall be silent and wise,
And bold in battle as well;
Bravely and gladly | a man shall go,
Till the day of his death is come.

16. The sluggard believes | he shall live forever,
If the fight he faces not;
But age shall not grant him | the gift of peace,
Though spears may spare his life.

17. The fool is agape | when he comes to the feast,
He stammers or else is still;
But soon if he gets | a drink is it seen
What the mind of the man is like.

[13. *The heron*: the bird of forgetfulness, referred to in line 1. *Gunnloth*: the daughter of the giant Suttung, from whom Othin won the mead of poetry. For this episode see stanzas 104-110.

14. *Fjalar*: apparently another name for Suttung. This stanza, and probably 13, seem to have been inserted as illustrative.]

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18. He alone is aware | who has wandered wide,
And far abroad has fared,
How great a mind | is guided by him
That wealth of wisdom has.

19. Shun not the mead, | but drink in measure;
Speak to the point or be still;
For rudeness none | shall rightly blame thee
If soon thy bed thou seekest.

20. The greedy man, | if his mind be vague,
Will eat till sick he is;
The vulgar man, | when among the wise,
To scorn by his belly is brought.

21. The herds know well | when home they shall fare,
And then from the grass they go;
But the foolish man | his belly's measure
Shall never know aright.

22. A paltry man | and poor of mind
At all things ever mocks;
For never he knows, | what he ought to know,
That he is not free from faults.

23. The witless man | is awake all night,
Thinking of many things;
Care-worn he is | when the morning comes,
And his woe is just as it was.

24. The foolish man | for friends all those
Who laugh at him will hold;

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When among the wise | he marks it not
Though hatred of him they speak.

25. The foolish man | for friends all those
Who laugh at him will hold;
But the truth when he comes | to the council he learns,
That few in his favor will speak.

26. An ignorant man | thinks that all he knows,
When he sits by himself in a corner;
But never what answer | to make he knows,
When others with questions come.

27. A witless man, | when he meets with men,
Had best in silence abide;
For no one shall find | that nothing he knows,
If his mouth is not open too much.
(But a man knows not, | if nothing he knows,
When his mouth has been open too much.)

28. Wise shall he seem | who well can question,
And also answer well;
Nought is concealed | that men may say
Among the sons of men.

29. Often he speaks | who never is still
With words that win no faith;

[25. The first two lines are abbreviated in the manuscript, but are doubtless identical with the first two lines of stanza 24.

27. The last two lines were probably added as a commentary on lines 3 and 4.]

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The babbling tongue, | if a bridle it find not,
Oft for itself sings ill.

30. In mockery no one | a man shall hold,
Although he fare to the feast;
Wise seems one oft, | if nought he is asked,
And safely he sits dry-skinned.

31. Wise a guest holds it | to take to his heels,
When mock of another he makes;
But little he knows | who laughs at the feast,
Though he mocks in the midst of his foes.

32. Friendly of mind | are many men,
Till feasting they mock at their friends;
To mankind a bane | must it ever be
When guests together strive.

33. Oft should one make | an early meal,
Nor fasting come to the feast;
Else he sits and chews | as if he would choke,
And little is able to ask.

34. Crooked and far | is the road to a foe,
Though his house on the highway be;
But wide and straight | is the way to a friend,
Though far away he fare.

35. Forth shall one go, | nor stay as a guest
In a single spot forever;

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Love becomes loathing | if long one sits
By the hearth in another's home.

36. Better a house, | though a hut it be,
A man is master at home;
A pair of goats | and a patched-up roof
Are better far than begging.

37. Better a house, | though a hut it be,
A man is master at home;

His heart is bleeding | who needs must beg
When food he fain would have.

38. Away from his arms | in the open field
A man should fare not a foot;
For never he knows | when the need for a spear
Shall arise on the distant road.

39. If wealth a man | has won for himself,
Let him never suffer in need;
Oft he saves for a foe | what he plans for a friend,
For much goes worse than we wish.

40. None so free with gifts | or food have I found
That gladly he took not a gift,

[36. The manuscript has "little" in place of "a hut" in line I, but this involves an error in the initial-rhymes, and the emendation has been generally accepted.

37. Lines I and 2 are abbreviated in the manuscript, but are doubtless identical with the first two lines of stanza 56.

39. In the manuscript this stanza follows stanza 40.]

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Nor one who so widely | scattered his wealth
That of recompense hatred he had.

41. Friends shall gladden each other | with arms and garments,
As each for himself can see;
Gift-givers' friendships | are longest found,
If fair their fates may be.

42. To his friend a man | a friend shall prove,
And gifts with gifts requite;
But men shall mocking | with mockery answer,
And fraud with falsehood meet.

43. To his friend a man | a friend shall prove,
To him and the friend of his friend;
But never a man | shall friendship make
With one of his foeman's friends.

44. If a friend thou hast | whom thou fully wilt trust,
And good from him wouldst get,

Thy thoughts with his mingle, | and gifts shalt thou make,
And fare to find him oft.

[40. The key-word in line 3 is missing in the manuscript, but editors have agreed in inserting a word meaning "generous."

41. In line 3 the manuscript adds "givers again" to "gift-givers."]

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45. If another thou hast | whom thou hardly wilt trust,
Yet good from him wouldst get,
Thou shalt speak him fair, | but falsely think,
And fraud with falsehood requite.

46. So is it with him | whom thou hardly wilt trust,
And whose mind thou mayst not know;
Laugh with him mayst thou, | but speak not thy mind,
Like gifts to his shalt thou give.

47. Young was I once, | and wandered alone,
And nought of the road I knew;
Rich did I feel | when a comrade I found,
For man is man's delight.

48. The lives of the brave | and noble are best,
Sorrows they seldom feed;
But the coward fear | of all things feels,
And not gladly the niggard gives.

49. My garments once | in a field I gave
To a pair of carven poles;
Heroes they seemed | when clothes they had,
But the naked man is nought.

50. On the hillside drear | the fir-tree dies,
All bootless its needles and bark;
It is like a man | whom no one loves,--
Why should his life be long?

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51. Hotter than fire | between false friends
Does friendship five days burn;
When the sixth day comes | the fire cools,
And ended is all the love.

52. No great thing needs | a man to give,
Oft little will purchase praise;
With half a loaf | and a half-filled cup
A friend full fast I made.

53. A little sand | has a little sea,
And small are the minds of men;
Though all men are not | equal in wisdom,
Yet half-wise only are all.

54. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,
But never too much let him know;
The fairest lives | do those men live
Whose wisdom wide has grown.

55. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,
But never too much let him know;
For the wise man's heart | is seldom happy,
If wisdom too great he has won.

56. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,
But never too much let him know;

[55-56. The first pairs of lines are abbreviated in the manuscript.]

{p. 40}

Let no man the fate | before him see,
For so is he freest from sorrow.

57. A brand from a brand | is kindled and burned,
And fire from fire begotten;
And man by his speech | is known to men,
And the stupid by their stillness.

58. He must early go forth | who fain the blood
Or the goods of another would get;
The wolf that lies idle | shall win little meat,
Or the sleeping man success.

59. He must early go forth | whose workers are few,
Himself his work to seek;
Much remains undone | for the morning-sleeper,
For the swift is wealth half won.

60. Of seasoned shingles | and strips of bark
For the thatch let one know his need,
And how much of wood | he must have for a month,
Or in half a year he will use.

61. Washed and fed | to the council fare,
But care not too much for thy clothes;
Let none be ashamed | of his shoes and hose,
Less still of the steed he rides,
(Though poor be the horse he has.)

[61. The fifth line is probably a spurious addition.]

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62. When the eagle comes | to the ancient sea,
He snaps and hangs his head;
So is a man | in the midst of a throng,
Who few to speak for him finds.

63. To question and answer | must all be ready
Who wish to be known as wise;
Tell one thy thoughts, | but beware of two,--
All know what is known to three.

64. The man who is prudent | a measured use
Of the might he has will make;
He finds when among | the brave he fares
That the boldest he may not be.

65. . . . . .
. . . . . .
Oft for the words | that to others one speaks
He will get but an evil gift.

66. Too early to many | a meeting I came,
And some too late have I sought;
The beer was all drunk, | or not yet brewed;
Little the loathed man finds.

[62. This stanza follows stanza 63 in the manuscript, but there are marks therein indicating the transposition.

65. The manuscript indicates no lacuna (lines I and 2). Many editors have filled out the stanza with two lines from late paper manuscripts, the passage running:

"A man must be watchful | and wary as well,
And fearful of trusting a friend."

]

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67. To their homes men would bid | me hither and yon,
If at meal-time I needed no meat,
Or would hang two hams | in my true friend's house,
Where only one I had eaten.

68. Fire for men | is the fairest gift,
And power to see the sun;
Health as well, | if a man may have it,
And a life not stained with sin.

69. All wretched is no man, | though never so sick;
Some from their sons have joy,
Some win it from kinsmen, | and some from their wealth,
And some from worthy works.

70. It is better to live | than to lie a corpse,
The live man catches the cow;
I saw flames rise | for the rich man's pyre,
And before his door he lay dead.

71. The lame rides a horse, | the handless is herdsman,
The deaf in battle is bold;
The blind man is better | than one that is burned,
No good can come of a corpse.

[70. The manuscript has "and a worthy life" in place of "than to lie a corpse" in line I, but Rask suggested the emendation as early as 1818, and most editors have followed him.]

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72. A son is better, | though late he be born,
And his father to death have fared;
Memory-stones | seldom stand by the road
Save when kinsman honors his kin.

73. Two make a battle, | the tongue slays the head;
In each furry coat | a fist I look for.

74. He welcomes the night | whose fare is enough,
(Short are the yards of a ship,)

Uneasy are autumn nights;
Full oft does the weather | change in a week,
And more in a month's time.

75. A man knows not, | if nothing he knows,
That gold oft apes begets;
One man is wealthy | and one is poor,
Yet scorn for him none should know.

76. Among Fitjung's sons | saw I well-stocked folds,--
Now bear they the beggar's staff;

[73-74. These seven lines are obviously a jumble. The two lines of stanza 73 not only appear out of place, but the verse form is unlike that of the surrounding stanzas. In 74, the second line is clearly interpolated, and line I has little enough connection with lines 3, 4 and 5. It looks as though some compiler (or copyist) had inserted here various odds and ends for which he could find no better place.

75. The word "gold" in line 2 is more or less conjectural, the manuscript being obscure. The reading in line 4 is also doubtful.]

{p. 44}

Wealth is as swift | as a winking eye,
Of friends the falsest it is.

77. Cattle die, | and kinsmen die,
And so one dies one's self;
But a noble name | will never die,
If good renown one gets.

78. Cattle die, | and kinsmen die,
And so one dies one's self;
One thing now | that never dies,
The fame of a dead man's deeds.

79. Certain is that | which is sought from runes,
That the gods so great have made,
And the Master-Poet painted;
. . . . . .
. . . . . of the race of gods:
Silence is safest and best.

80. An unwise man, | if a maiden's love
Or wealth he chances to win,

[76. in the manuscript this stanza follows 79, the order being: 77, 78, 76, 80, 79, 81. *Fitjung* ("the Nourisher"): Earth.

79. This stanza is certainly in bad shape, and probably out of place here. Its reference to runes as magic signs suggests that it properly belongs in some list of charms like the *Ljothatal* (stanzas 147-165). The stanza-form is so irregular as to show either that something has been lost or that there have been interpolations. The manuscript indicates no lacuna; Gering fills out the assumed gap as follows:

> "Certain is that which is sought from runes,
> The runes--," etc.

]

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His pride will wax, but his wisdom never,
Straight forward he fares in conceit.

* * *

81. Give praise to the day at evening, | to a woman on her pyre,
To a weapon which is tried, | to a maid at wed lock,
To ice when it is crossed, | to ale that is drunk.

82. When the gale blows hew wood, | in fair winds seek the water;
Sport with maidens at dusk, | for day's eyes are many;
From the ship seek swiftness, | from the shield protection,
Cuts from the sword, | from the maiden kisses.

83. By the fire drink ale, | over ice go on skates;
Buy a steed that is lean, | and a sword when tarnished,

[81. With this stanza the verse-form, as indicated in the translation, abruptly changes to Malahattr. What has happened seems to have been something like this. Stanza 80 introduces the idea of man's love for woman. Consequently some reciter or compiler (or possibly even a copyist) took occasion to insert at this point certain stanzas concerning the ways of women. Thus stanza 80 would account for the introduction of stanzas 81 and 82, which, in turn, apparently drew stanza 83 in with them. Stanza 84 suggests the fickleness of women, and is immediately followed--again with a change of verse-form--by a list of things equally untrustworthy (stanzas 85-90). Then, after a few more stanzas on love in the regular measure of the *Hovamol* (stanza 91-9s), is introduced, by way of illustration, Othin's story of his {footnote p. 46} adventure with Billing's daughter (stanzas 96-102). Some such process of growth, whatever its specific stages may have been, must be assumed to account for the curious chaos of the whole passage from stanza 81 to stanza 102.]

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The horse at home fatten, | the hound in thy dwelling.

* * *

84. A man shall trust not | the oath of a maid,
Nor the word a woman speaks;

For their hearts on a whirling | wheel were fashioned,
And fickle their breasts were formed.

85. In a breaking bow | or a burning flame,
A ravening wolf | or a croaking raven,
In a grunting boar, | a tree with roots broken,
In billowy seas | or a bubbling kettle,

86. In a flying arrow | or falling waters,
In ice new formed | or the serpent's folds,
In a bride's bed-speech | or a broken sword,
In the sport of bears | or in sons of kings,

87. In a calf that is sick | or a stubborn thrall,
A flattering witch | or a foe new slain.

[84. Lines 3 and 4 are quoted in the *Fostbræthrasaga*.

85. Stanzas 85-88 and go are in Fornyrthislag, and clearly come from a different source from the rest of the *Hovamol*.

87. The stanza is doubtless incomplete. Some editors add from a late paper manuscript two lines running:

> "In a light, clear sky | or a laughing throng,
> In the bowl of a dog | or a harlot's grief!"

]

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88. In a brother's slayer, | if thou meet him abroad,
In a half-burned house, | in a horse full swift--
One leg is hurt | and the horse is useless--
None had ever such faith | as to trust in them all.

89. Hope not too surely | for early harvest,
Nor trust too soon in thy son;
The field needs good weather, | the son needs wisdom,
And oft is either denied.

* * *

90. The love of women | fickle of will
Is like starting o'er ice | with a steed unshod,
A two-year-old restive | and little tamed,
Or steering a rudderless | ship in a storm,
Or, lame, hunting reindeer | on slippery rocks.

* * *

91. Clear now will I speak, | for I know them both,
Men false to women are found;
When fairest we speak, | then falsest we think,
Against wisdom we work with deceit.

92. Soft words shall he speak | and wealth shall he offer
Who longs for a maiden's love,
And the beauty praise | of the maiden bright;
He wins whose wooing is best.

[89. This stanza follows stanza 89 in the manuscript. Many editors have changed the order, for while stanza 89 is pretty clearly an interpolation wherever it stands, it seriously interferes with the sense if it breaks in between 87 and 88.]

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93. Fault for loving | let no man find
Ever with any other;
Oft the wise are fettered, | where fools go free,
By beauty that breeds desire.

94. Fault with another | let no man find
For what touches many a man;
Wise men oft | into witless fools
Are made by mighty love.

95. The head alone knows | what dwells near the heart,
A man knows his mind alone;
No sickness is worse | to one who is wise
Than to lack the longed-for joy.

96. This found I myself, | when I sat in the reeds,
And long my love awaited;
As my life the maiden | wise I loved,
Yet her I never had.

97. Billing's daughter | I found on her bed,
In slumber bright as the sun;
Empty appeared | an earl's estate
Without that form so fair.

[96. Here begins the passage (stanzas 96-102) illustrating the falseness of woman by the story of Othin's unsuccessful love affair with Billing's daughter. Of this person we know nothing beyond what is here told, but the story needs little comment.]

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98. "Othin, again | at evening come,
If a woman thou wouldst win;
Evil it were | if others than we
Should know of such a sin."

99. Away I hastened, | hoping for joy,
And careless of counsel wise;
Well I believed | that soon I should win
Measureless joy with the maid.

100. So came I next | when night it was,
The warriors all were awake;
With burning lights | and waving brands
I learned my luckess way.

101. At morning then, | when once more I came,
And all were sleeping still,
A dog found | in the fair one's place,
Bound there upon her bed.

102. Many fair maids, | if a man but tries them,
False to a lover are found;
That did I learn | when I longed to gain
With wiles the maiden wise;

[102. Rask adds at the beginning of this stanza two lines from a late paper manuscript, running:

> "Few are so good | that false they are never
> To cheat the mind of a man."

He makes these two lines plus lines I and 2 a full stanza, and line 3, 4, 5, and 6 a second stanza.]

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Foul scorn was my meed | from the crafty maid,
And nought from the woman I won.

* * *

103. Though glad at home, | and merry with guests,
A man shall be wary and wise;
The sage and shrewd, | wide wisdom seeking,
Must see that his speech be fair;
A fool is he named | who nought can say,
For such is the way of the witless.

104. I found the old giant, | now back have I fared,
Small gain from silence I got;
Full many a word, | my will to get,
I spoke in Suttung's hall.

105. The mouth of Rati | made room for my passage,
And space in the stone he gnawed;

[103. With this stanza the subject changes abruptly, and apparently the virtues of fair speech, mentioned in the last three lines, account for the introduction, from what source cannot be known, of the story of Othin and the mead of song (stanzas 104-110).

104. The giant *Suttung* ("the old giant") possessed the magic mead, a draught of which conferred the gift of poetry. Othin, desiring to obtain it, changed himself into a snake, bored his way through a mountain into Suttung's home, made love to the giant's daughter, Gunnloth, and by her connivance drank up all the mead. Then he flew away in the form of an eagle, leaving Gunnloth to her fate. While with Suttung he assumed the name of Bolverk ("the Evil-Doer").

105. *Rati* ("the Traveller"): the gimlet with which Othin bored through the mountain to reach Suttung's home.]

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Above and below | the giants' paths lay,
So rashly I risked my head.

106. Gunnloth gave | on a golden stool
A drink of the marvelous mead;
A harsh reward | did I let her have
For her heroic heart,
And her spirit troubled sore.

107. The well-earned beauty | well I enjoyed,
Little the wise man lacks;
So Othrörir now | has up been brought
To the midst of the men of earth.

108. Hardly, methinks, | would I home have come,
And left the giants' land,
Had not Gunnloth helped me, | the maiden good,
Whose arms about me had been.

109. The day that followed, | the frost-giants came,
Some word of Hor to win,
(And into the hall of Hor;)

[106. Probably either the fourth or the fifth line is a spurious addition.

107. *Othrörir*: here the name of the magic mead itself, whereas in stanza 141 it is the name of the vessel containing it. Othin had no intention of bestowing any of the precious mead upon men, but as he was flying over the earth, hotly pursued by Suttung, he spilled some of it out of his mouth, and in this way mankind also won the gift of poetry.

108. *Hor*: Othin ("the High One"). The frost-giants, Suttung's kinsmen, appear not to have suspected Othin of being {footnote p. 52} identical with Bolverk, possibly because the oath referred to in stanza I to was an oath made by Othin to Suttung that there was no such person as Bolverk among the gods. The giants, of course, fail to get from Othin the information they seek concerning Bolverk, but Othin is keenly conscious of having violated the most sacred of oaths, that sworn on his ring.]

{p. 52}

Of Bolverk they asked, | were he back midst the gods,
Or had Suttung slain him there?

110. On his ring swore Othin | the oath, methinks;
Who now his troth shall trust?
Suttung's betrayal | he sought with drink,
And Gunnloth to grief he left.

* * *

111. It is time to chant | from the chanter's stool;
By the wells of Urth I was,
I saw and was silent, | I saw and thought,
And heard the speech of Hor.
(Of runes heard I words, | nor were counsels wanting,
At the hall of Hor,
In the hall of Hor;
Such was the speech I heard.)

[111. With this stanza begins the Loddfafnismol (stanzas 111-138). Loddfafnir is apparently a wandering singer, who, from his "chanter's stool," recites the verses which he claims to have received from Othin. *Wells of Urth*: cf. *Voluspo*, 19 and note. Urth ("the Past") is one of the three Norns. This stanza is apparently in corrupt form, and editors have tried many experiments with it, both in rejecting lines as spurious and in rear ranging the words and punctuation. It looks rather as though the first four lines formed a complete stanza, and the last four had crept in later. The phrase translated "the speech of Hor" is "Hova mol," later used as the title for the entire poem.]

{p. 53}

112. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,---
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Rise not at night, | save if news thou seekest,
Or fain to the outhouse wouldst fare.

113. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Beware of sleep | on a witch's bosom,
Nor let her limbs ensnare thee.

114. Such is her might | that thou hast no mind
For the council or meeting of men;
Meat thou hatest, | joy thou hast not,
And sadly to slumber thou farest.

115. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:

[112. Lines 1-3 are the formula, repeated (abbreviated in the manuscript) in most of the stanzas, with which Othin prefaces his counsels to Loddfafnir, and throughout this section, except in stanzas 111 and 138, Loddfafnir represents himself as simply quoting Othin's words. The material is closely analogous to that contained in the first eighty stanzas of the poem. In some cases (e. g., stanzas 117, 119, 121, 126 and 130) the formula precedes a full four-line stanza instead of two (or three) lines.]

{p. 54}

Seek never to win | the wife of another,
Or long for her secret love.

116. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If o'er mountains or gulfs | thou fain wouldst go,
Look well to thy food for the way.

117. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
An evil man | thou must not let
Bring aught of ill to thee;
For an evil man | will never make
Reward for a worthy thought.

118. I saw a man | who was wounded sore
By an evil woman's word;
A lying tongue | his death-blow launched,
And no word of truth there was.

119. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,

Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If a friend thou hast | whom thou fully wilt trust,
Then fare to find him oft;
For brambles grow | and waving grass
On the rarely trodden road.

{p. 55}

120. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
A good man find | to hold in friendship,
And give heed to his healing charms.

121. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Be never the first | to break with thy friend
The bond that holds you both;
Care eats the heart | if thou canst not speak
To another all thy thought.

122. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Exchange of words | with a witless ape
Thou must not ever make.

123. For never thou mayst | from an evil man
A good requital get;
But a good man oft | the greatest love
Through words of praise will win thee.

124. Mingled is love | when a man can speak
To another all his thought;

{p. 56}

Nought is so bad | as false to be,
No friend speaks only fair.

125. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
With a worse man speak not | three words in dispute,

Ill fares the better oft
When the worse man wields a sword.

126. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
A shoemaker be, | or a maker of shafts,
For only thy single self;
If the shoe is ill made, | or the shaft prove false,
Then evil of thee men think.

127. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If evil thou knowest, | as evil proclaim it,
And make no friendship with foes.

128. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,

{p. 57}

Great thy gain if thou learnest:
In evil never | joy shalt thou know,
But glad the good shall make thee.

129. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Look not up | when the battle is on,--
(Like madmen the sons | of men become,--)
Lest men bewitch thy wits.

130. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If thou fain wouldst win | a woman's love,
And gladness get from her,
Fair be thy promise | and well fulfilled;
None loathes what good he gets.

131. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
I bid thee be wary, | but be not fearful;

(Beware most with ale or another's wife,
And third beware | lest a thief outwit thee.)

[129. Line 5 is apparently interpolated.

131. Lines 5-6 probably were inserted from a different poem.]

{p. 58}

132. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Scorn or mocking | ne'er shalt thou make
Of a guest or a journey-goer.

133. Oft scarcely he knows | who sits in the house
What kind is the man who comes;
None so good is found | that faults he has not,
Nor so wicked that nought he is worth.

134. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
Scorn not ever | the gray-haired singer,
Oft do the old speak good;
(Oft from shrivelled skin | come skillful counsels,
Though it hang with the hides,
And flap with the pelts,
And is blown with the bellies.)

[133. Many editors reject the last two lines of this stanza as spurious, putting the first two lines at the end of the preceding stanza. Others, attaching lines 3 and 4 to stanza 132, insert as the first two lines of stanza 133 two lines from a late paper manuscript, running:

> "Evil and good | do men's sons ever
> "Mingled bear in their breasts."

134. Presumably the last four lines have been added to this stanza, for the parallelism in the last three makes it probable that they belong together. The wrinkled skin of the old man is {footnote p. 59} compared with the dried skins and bellies of animals kept for various purposes hanging in an Icelandic house.]

{p. 59}

135. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:

Curse not thy guest, | nor show him thy gate,
Deal well with a man in want.

136. Strong is the beam | that raised must be
To give an entrance to all;
Give it a ring, | or grim will be
The wish it would work on thee.

137. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede,--
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
When ale thou drinkest) | seek might of earth,
(For earth cures drink, | and fire cures ills,
The oak cures tightness, | the ear cures magic,
Rye cures rupture, | the moon cures rage,
Grass cures the scab, | and runes the sword-cut;)
The field absorbs the flood.

[136. This stanza suggests the dangers of too much hospitality. The beam (bolt) which is ever being raised to admit guests be comes weak thereby. It needs a ring to help it in keeping the door closed, and without the ability at times to ward off guests a man becomes the victim of his own generosity.

137. The list of "household remedies" in this stanza is doubtless interpolated. Their nature needs no comment here.]

{p. 60}

138. Now are Hor's words | spoken in the hall,
Kind for the kindred of men,
Cursed for the kindred of giants:
Hail to the speaker, | and to him who learns!
Profit be his who has them!
Hail to them who hearken!

* * *

139. I ween that I hung | on the windy tree,
Hung there for nights full nine;
With the spear I was wounded, | and offered I was
To Othin, myself to myself,
On the tree that none | may ever know
What root beneath it runs.

[138. In the manuscript this stanza comes at the end of the entire poem, following stanza 165. Most recent editors have followed Müllenhoff in shifting it to this position, as it appears to conclude the passage introduced by the somewhat similar stanza 111.

139. With this stanza begins the most confusing part of the *Hovamol*: the group of eight stanzas leading up to the Ljothatal, or list of charms. Certain paper manuscripts have before this stanza a title: "Othin's Tale of the Runes." Apparently stanzas 139, 140 and 142 are fragments of an account of how Othin obtained the runes; 141 is erroneously inserted from some version of the magic mead story (cf. stanzas 104-110); and stanzas 143, 144, 145, and 146 are from miscellaneous sources, all, however, dealing with the general subject of runes. With stanza 147 a clearly continuous passage begins once more. *The windy tree*: the ash Yggdrasil (literally "the Horse of Othin," so called be cause of this story), on which Othin, in order to win the magic runes, hanged himself as an offering to himself, and wounded himself with his own spear. Lines 5 and 6 have presumably been borrowed from *Svipdagsmol*, 30.]

{p. 61}

140. None made me happy | with loaf or horn,
And there below I looked;
I took up the runes, | shrieking I took them,
And forthwith back I fell.

141. Nine mighty songs | I got from the son
Of Bolthorn, Bestla's father;
And a drink I got | of the goodly mead
Poured out from Othrörir.

142. Then began I to thrive, | and wisdom to get,
I grew and well I was;
Each word led me on | to another word,
Each deed to another deed.

143. Runes shalt thou find, | and fateful signs,
That the king of singers colored,
And the mighty gods have made;

[141. This stanza, interrupting as it does the account of Othin's winning the runes, appears to be an interpolation. The meaning of the stanza is most obscure. Bolthorn was Othin's grandfather, and Bestla his mother. We do not know the name of the uncle here mentioned, but it has been suggested that this son of Bolthorn was Mimir (cf. *Voluspo*, 27 and note, and 47 and note). In any case, the nine magic songs which he learned from his uncle seem to have enabled him to win the magic mead (cf. stanzas 104-110). Concerning *Othrörir*, here used as the name of the vessel containing the mead, cf. stanza 107 and note.

143. This and the following stanza belong together, and in many editions appear as a single stanza. They presumably come from some lost poem on the authorship of the runes. Lines 2 and 3 follow line 4 in the manuscript; the transposition was suggested by Bugge. *The king of singers*: Othin. The magic signs (runes) were commonly carved in wood, then colored red.]

{p. 62}

Full strong the signs, | full mighty the signs
That the ruler of gods doth write.

144. Othin for the gods, | Dain for the elves,
And Dvalin for the dwarfs,
Alsvith for giants | and all mankind,
And some myself I wrote.

145. Knowest how one shall write, | knowest how one shall rede?
Knowest how one shall tint, | knowest how one makes trial?
Knowest how one shall ask, | knowest how one shall offer?
Knowest how one shall send, | knowest how one shall sacrifice?

[144. *Dain* and *Dvalin*: dwarfs; cf. *Voluspo*, 14, and note. Dain, however, may here be one of the elves rather than the dwarf of. that name. The two names also appear together in *Grimnismol*, 33, where they are applied to two of the four harts that nibble at the topmost twigs of Yggdrasil. *Alsvith* ("the All Wise") appears nowhere else as a giant's name. *Myself*: Othin. We have no further information concerning the list of those who wrote the runes for the various races, and these four lines seem like a confusion of names in the rather hazy mind of some reciter.

145. This Malahattr stanza appears to be a regular religious formula, concerned less with the runes which one "writes" and "tints" (cf. stanza 79) than with the prayers which one "asks" and the sacrifices which one "offers" and "sends." Its origin is wholly uncertain, but it is clearly an interpolation here. In the manuscript the phrase "knowest?" is abbreviated after the first line.]

{p. 63}

146. Better no prayer | than too big an offering,
By thy getting measure thy gift;
Better is none | than too big a sacrifice,
. . . . . .
So Thund of old wrote | ere man's race began,
Where he rose on high | when home he came.

* * *

147. The songs I know | that king's wives know not,
Nor men that are sons of men;
The first is called help, | and help it can bring thee
In sorrow and pain and sickness.

148. A second I know, | that men shall need
Who leechcraft long to use;
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

[146. This stanza as translated here follows the manuscript reading, except in assuming a gap between lines 3 and 5. In Vigfusson and Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* the first three lines have somehow been expanded into eight. The last two lines are almost certainly misplaced; Bugge suggests that they belong at the end of stanza 144. *Thund*: another name for Othin. *When home he came*: presumably after obtaining the runes as described in stanzas 139 and 140.

147. With this stanza begins the *Ljothatal*, or list of charms. The magic songs themselves are not given, but in each case the peculiar application of the charm is explained. The passage, which is certainly approximately complete as far as it goes, runs to the end of the poem. In the manuscript and in most editions line 4 falls into two half-lines, running:

"In sickness and pain | and every sorrow."

]

{p. 64}

149. A third I know, | if great is my need
Of fetters to hold my foe;
Blunt do I make | mine enemy's blade,
Nor bites his sword or staff.

150. A fourth I know, | if men shall fasten
Bonds on my bended legs;
So great is the charm | that forth I may go,
The fetters spring from my feet,
Broken the bonds from my hands.

152. A fifth I know, | if I see from afar
An arrow fly 'gainst the folk;
It flies not so swift | that I stop it not,
If ever my eyes behold it.

152. A sixth I know, | if harm one seeks
With a sapling's roots to send me;
The hero himself | who wreaks his hate
Shall taste the ill ere I.

153. A seventh I know, | if I see in flames
The hall o'er my comrades' heads;
It burns not so wide | that I will not quench it,
I know that song to sing.

[148. *Second*, etc., appear in the manuscript as Roman numerals. The manuscript indicates no gap after line 2.

152. The sending of a root with runes written thereon was an excellent way of causing death. So died the Icelandic hero Grettir the Strong.]

{p. 65}

154. An eighth I know, | that is to all
Of greatest good to learn;

When hatred grows | among heroes' sons,
I soon can set it right.

155. A ninth I know, | if need there comes
To shelter my ship on the flood;
The wind I calm | upon the waves,
And the sea I put to sleep.

156. A tenth I know, | what time I see
House-riders flying on high;
So can I work | that wildly they go,
Showing their true shapes,
Hence to their own homes.

157. An eleventh I know, | if needs I must lead
To the fight my long-loved friends;
I sing in the shields, | and in strength they go
Whole to the field of fight,
Whole from the field of fight,
And whole they come thence home.

158. A twelfth I know, | if high on a tree
I see a hanged man swing;

[156. *House-riders*: witches, who ride by night on the roofs of houses, generally in the form of wild beasts. Possibly one of the last two lines is spurious.

157. The last line looks like an unwarranted addition, and line 4 may likewise be spurious.

158. Lines 4-5 are probably expanded from a single line.]

{p. 66}

So do I write | and color the runes
That forth he fares,
And to me talks.

159. A thirteenth I know, | if a thane full young
With water I sprinkle well;
He shall not fall, | though he fares mid the host,
Nor sink beneath the swords.

160. A fourteenth I know, | if fain I would name
To men the mighty gods;
All know I well | of the gods and elves,
Few be the fools know this.

161. A fifteenth I know, | that before the doors
Of Delling sang Thjothrörir the dwarf;
Might he sang for the gods, | and glory for elves,
And wisdom for Hroptatyr wise.

162. A sixteenth I know, | if I seek delight
To win from a maiden wise;
The mind I turn | of the white-armed maid,
And thus change all her thoughts.

[159. The sprinkling of a child with water was an established custom long before Christianity brought its conception of baptism.

161. This stanza, according to Müllenhoff, was the original conclusion of the poem, the phrase "a fifteenth" being inserted only after stanzas 162-165 had crept in. *Delling*: a seldom mentioned god who married Not (Night). Their son was Dag (Day). *Thjothrörir*: not mentioned elsewhere. *Hroptatyr*: Othin.]

{p. 67}

163. A seventeenth I know, | so that seldom shall go
A maiden young from me;
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

164. Long these songs | thou shalt, Loddfafnir,
Seek in vain to sing;
Yet good it were | if thou mightest get them,
Well, if thou wouldst them learn,
Help, if thou hadst them.

165. An eighteenth I know, | that ne'er will I tell
To maiden or wife of man,--
The best is what none | but one's self doth know,
So comes the end of the songs,--
Save only to her | in whose arms I lie,
Or who else my sister is.

[163. Some editors have combined these two lines with stanza 164. Others have assumed that the gap follows the first half-line, making "so that-from me" the end of the stanza.

164. This stanza is almost certainly an interpolation, and seems to have been introduced after the list of charms and the *Loddfafnismol* (stanzas 111-138) were combined in a single poem, for there is no other apparent excuse for the reference to Loddfafnir at this point. The words "if thou mightest get them" are a conjectural emendation.

165. This stanza is almost totally obscure. The third and fourth lines look like interpolations.]

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